

FAREHAM *The* & GOSPORT *News*



The We Can Do It newspaper

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FINAL

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Claridge:
How it feels
playing the
team I love

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Why did my mum die?

The question that could change the whole NHS

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Why it's sometimes right to make a fuss for the good of all our health

Police have accepted Crown Prosecution Service advice not to proceed at this stage with action against doctors who treated 91-year-old Gladys Richards. But that does not mean her daughter, who raised the case, should be dismissed as some kind of troublemaker.

The fact is the world needs people like Gillian Mackenzie. It needs people to ask questions of authority in whatever form – particularly, perhaps, of the medical

profession to whose superior knowledge most of us are all too ready to bow.

No doubt life would often be easier for doctors in an over-stretched National Health Service if we did all accept their advice without a murmur.

But even in hospital, even where quality of life is poor, we or our relatives retain a right to some say over what

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happens to our own bodies.

As a society, we have to be particularly careful that elderly patients, in particular, are treated with proper

consideration. They cannot always understand or even hear what is being said to them and are therefore unable to speak up for themselves.

That is where people like Mrs

Mackenzie come in – and it is why, despite the CPS verdict, we welcome the continuing investigation by the independent Commission for Health Improvement into care provided at Gosport War Memorial Hospital, where Mrs Richards died.

It might be that no faulty practices will be uncovered. We hope so. But if the investigation does no more than reassure a concerned public, it will have been worthwhile.

Simon TOFT

SOMETHING TO SAY



Revenge can really stink

You know how sometimes you hear something so fanciful that you immediately dismiss it as a just another urban myth?

For example, the story of the jilted girlfriend who used her key to let herself into a former partner's house while he was away on a fortnight's holiday and proceeded to ring up a premium line in America, then leave the phone off the hook.

When his next phone bill arrived, it was apparently for several thousand pounds. The person who told me this swore it was true, but I've always doubted the veracity of such claims.

The one about the spurned ex cultivating cress on a boyfriend's carpets that had covered his house by the time he returned from a business trip sounded equally unlikely.

Until now, that is. Because at the weekend I met a real life bunny-boiler and suddenly it's all too believable.

She was the sort of woman who definitely didn't take kindly to being dumped. Believe me, this one would make Glenn Close's wild-eyed character in *Fatal Attraction* seem like Julie Andrews.

A group of us got talking about how two of the party were still single and on the lookout for suitable boyfriend material.

Then the pretty, petite blonde Baby Spice lookalike with the sweet, innocent smile demonstrated how you should never judge people on their appearance.

Apparently, she'd got increasingly fed up with one bloke because he never phoned when he said he would. So she split up with him - and immediately began plotting her revenge.

Scratching his beloved car or chopping the crotches out of his suits would be far too obvious. No, what she had in mind was decidedly more devious.

So, when he was out for the night, she seized her chance. Letting herself into the flat they'd shared, she quickly and skilfully sewed several pieces of specially-bought haddock into the linings of his living room curtains.

With unrestrained glee, she went on to relate how the fish went off and the place began to stink. He searched high and low but couldn't trace the cause.

What is it they say about hell hath no fury like a woman scorned? You'd better believe it.

It's art for nobody's sake

Another Turner Prize and further proof that the Luvvies of the art world are in danger of disappearing up their own fundaments.

This time it's Martin Creed, whose work features lights in an empty room flickering on and off every five seconds, who has won the £20,000 first prize. His previous portfolio includes crumpled-up sheets of A4 paper and blobs of Blu-Tack stuck on a wall.

Doesn't it speak volumes that some of his work was actually thrown away because cleaners assumed it was rubbish? What a pity they're not asked to be Turner judges instead of the pretentious lot who prattle on about conceptual context and minimalism over the canapes.

I wonder if any of them have read *The Emperor's New Clothes*? Probably far too mainstream.

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It happened today

1889: Poet Robert Browning died.
1913: Leonardo Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, stolen from the Louvre in Paris, was found in a bedroom of a small hotel in Florence.
1915: The German Junkers J1, the first all-metal aeroplane, was

test flown at Dessau.
1925: The world's first motel opened in California.
1955: The hovercraft was patented by British engineer Christopher Cockerell.
1988: A train crash at Clapham killed 35 people and injured 113.



WEDNESDAY'S INVESTIGATION

Hospital insists that drugs treatment was only viable option for a

The death that

A GOVERNMENT health watchdog has launched an investigation into the care of elderly people at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

The inquiry was sparked by the death, three years ago, of frail 91-year-old Gladys Richards.

Her passing led first to a major police investigation and now to an inquiry by the Commission for Health Improvement, which has the power to recommend changes in procedure across the National Health Service. Today chief reporter **CHRIS OWEN** examines how one death caused such widespread response.



cerned with us assuring ourselves that there is no need to widen the investigation.'

But the police probe sparked by Mrs Mackenzie has been followed by an investigation by the independent Commission for Health Improvement, a watchdog set up by the Department of Health. It started its inquiries last month. They are expected to continue for six months.

Its inspectors are studying the arrangements for administering drugs and the dosages, responsibility of patient care and the transfer of patients between the War Memorial and other

So what has driven Mrs Mackenzie to pursue the case with such tenacity? Today for the first time, *The News* outlines the details of the final days before Mrs Richards's death.

Mrs Mackenzie, who lives in East Sussex, describes her mother as a woman who was once sprightly and full of life. She enjoyed frequent get-togethers with her daughters.

'She had a very active mind and was fiercely independent. She loved crocheting and was always producing pieces of work for people,' said Mrs Mac-

depressant trazodone. Mrs Mackenzie said: 'We knew the operation was a risk, but she came through it well.'

'Afterwards my mother was certainly far more alert than she had been in the nursing home, but we were under no illusions regarding her survival chances bearing in mind her age.'

While she was in Haslar, doctors took her off the trazodone at the request of Mrs Mackenzie and her sister Lesley Lack, a former nurse.

Mrs Mackenzie said: 'She seemed much better for coming off the trazodone. On occasions she could speak coherently. Not very long sentences, but she was coherent. My mother was eating well and looked far better than she had for months.'

On Tuesday, August 11, Mrs Richards was transferred to the short distance from Haslar to Gosport's War Memorial Hospital to recuperate.

Before she left Haslar, a note in her hospital records said: '...she is now fully weight-bearing, walking with the aid of two nurses and a Zimmer frame.'

Two days later Mrs Richards's world was turned upside down again when she fell from a chair close to her bed at lunchtime.

She had to wait until the next morning to be X-rayed at the War Memorial Hospital because the hospital does not do X-rays at night. The results confirmed she had dislocated her new hip.

Mrs Mackenzie said: 'At the time, the War Memorial Hospital had a policy of not referring patients back to the A&E department at Haslar. This has now been changed, but why wasn't my mother examined immediately it happened? The X-ray department would still have been open.'

Mrs Mackenzie was critical of the hospital for merely giving her mother a strong sedative.

The following day Mrs Richards was then taken back to Haslar where the hip was manipulated back into position.

Three days later she returned to the War Memorial Hospital. Mrs Mackenzie said she was shocked when she went to see her mother. 'When my sister and I went through the doors of her ward to visit her that evening we could immediately hear her moaning.'

'When we pulled back her sheet she was lying in a very awkward position with weight on her newly-replaced hip.' A further X-ray at the War Memorial showed she was suffering from a massive haematoma - severe bruising to her new hip.

Later that day Mrs Mackenzie said she was told her mother would be given an injection of diamorphine. The heroin-based drug is normally only used on patients in severe pain or to comfort the dying.

Mrs Mackenzie, who watched her husband die from cancer, knew the implications.

'I'm really concerned about the amount of drugs she was given and the general standard of care at the War Memorial Hospital.'

Gillian Mackenzie, left



hospitals. They are looking at what the hospital might be failing to do and also what it gets right.

The inspectors' report could recommend local or national changes as a result.

Commission chief executive Peter Homa said: 'CHI is undertaking this investigation to look into concerns over the quality and culture of care that the patients, who are elderly and particularly vulnerable, have received at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.'

'The findings of our investigation will result in lessons for the whole of the NHS. This is especially important at a time when community and primary care services are undergoing major change.'

However, the police are still investigating the deaths of other elderly patients at the War Memorial Hospital and Mrs Mackenzie believes if these probes throw up new evidence, Mrs Richards's death may be looked at again.

Det Supt James told *The News*: 'Following the publicity concerning the inquiry into Mrs Richards's death, a number of members of the public contacted us expressing concerns about the circumstances of deaths of relatives at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.'

'We can confirm we are conducting preliminary inquiries to determine whether or not the matters should be subject to a more intensive investigation.'

'That process is more con-

frail old lady. But her daughters remain concerned about the circumstances in which she died

may change the NHS

She told *The News*: 'I immediately reacted and said: "No, you're not giving her diamorphine. Are we talking about a case of euthanasia here because I warn you I will not tolerate euthanasia".'

The following day, after spending the night at their mother's bedside, Mrs Mackenzie and her sister Lesley, were told nothing more could be done for their mother.

Mrs Mackenzie believed her mother was strong enough to undergo further hip surgery to relieve the pain.

But doctors felt she was not and that the only realistic option was to keep her pain free and allow her to die in peace.

She was put on a syringe driver which fed her regular doses of diamorphine (40mg), haloperidol (5mg) and medazolam (20mg) - a sleeping drug.

Mrs Mackenzie and her sister spent the next three days at their mother's bedside watching her life ebb away. She died on the evening of Friday, August 21.

The decision to administer those drugs was the key point in the subsequent police inquiry. That investigation ended with the announcement that there were insufficient grounds for any prosecution. And an internal inquiry sparked by a complaint from Mrs Mackenzie resulted in a decision that there were no grounds for disciplinary action.

But Mrs Mackenzie remains convinced that her mother should not have been given such a powerful mixture of drugs. She said: 'I believe that if my mother had been near death at the time we were told of the decision she would be given a drug driver, she would not have survived until the Friday night. That is a strong indication of the actual



Gladys Richards, right, died on August 21 but her daughters feel questions remain about the treatment she received

Left: Gosport War Memorial Hospital, where she died

state of her health.

'She must have had considerable reserves of strength to enable her to survive from the Monday until the Friday when all she had was a diet of diamorphine and no hydration whatsoever.'

'I'm really concerned about the amount of drugs she was given and the general standard of care at the War Memorial Hospital.'

Professor Ewan Thompson, of Imperial College, London, an expert in the treatment of elderly people, said: 'These are the correct drugs and dosages to use in a case like this.'

'But everything hinges on whether this was the right time to introduce the driver or whether Mrs Richards was strong enough to survive without having these drugs pumped into her automatically at regular intervals.'

Dr Michael Wilson of the anti-euthanasia group Alert, said: 'This is an area which is very difficult and open to debate. The syringe driver is usually introduced when death is very close and is used to relieve pain. It should not be used to speed up death.'

'The key question that has to be asked is: how close is

the patient to death?'

For Mrs Mackenzie, it is difficult to put the trauma behind her. 'Even though this happened more than three years ago, I still feel angry at the way my mother was treated and badly let down by the hospital,' she said. 'I just hope that my action means that nobody else's mother has to go through what mine did.'

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Patient was not well enough for further surgery - health boss

HEALTH bosses apologised to Gladys Richards's family for the way in which their mother was treated at the War Memorial Hospital.

Max Millett, the chief executive of the Portsmouth NHS HealthCare Trust, acknowledged that there had been a delay in establishing that the elderly woman had dislocated her hip and that it was unfortunate she was not X-rayed earlier.

But he insisted Mrs Richards was not well enough for further surgery under general anaesthetic and that the only realistic option was to administer drugs to keep her pain-free until death.

In a letter to Gillian Mackenzie's sister Lesley Lack in September 1998, Mr Millett said: 'With the benefit of hindsight it is possible to assume that your mother's dislocation could have been identified much earlier and we can now only apologise for that delay if that was



Max Millett

the case. It is notoriously difficult to establish degrees of pain or discomfort in dementia sufferers, but staff now recognise that more attention should have been paid to your mother's signs of discomfort.'

Mrs Lack had also asked why her mother was not X-rayed sooner and transferred to Haslar after the fall. Mr Millett said: 'These delays were as a direct result of the failure to identify a problem earlier in the day - because the X-ray department at Gosport War Memorial Hospital only operates from 9am to 5pm.'

'The transfer to Haslar was organised as soon as possible after the situation had been confirmed by X-ray on the morning of August 14.'

'It is a matter of great regret that this delay occurred and we accept and apologise for the fact that the standard of care fell below that which we aim to provide.'

In his letter, Mr Millett said doctors made it clear to both Mrs Lack and her sister Gillian Mackenzie that any further treatment would have required a general anaesthetic.

'Clearly your mother was not well enough for

such a procedure to be undertaken. Therefore, the priority, and only realistic option, was to keep her pain-free and allow her to die peacefully, with dignity.'

'All the staff concerned with the care of your mother were deeply saddened at her experience and sincere apologies are proffered to you and your sister for the problems which occurred and the failure of the service to meet your very reasonable expectations.'

'The only constructive aspect I can identify is that lessons have been learned and the experience will benefit future patients, although I fully appreciate that such benefits have little relevance to yourselves.'

In a statement to *The News*, Mr Millett said: 'We know Mrs Mackenzie was dissatisfied with the outcome of the police investigation, but from the trust's perspective her concerns were fully investigated by the police, with the full co-operation of the trust, and the Crown Prosecution Service found no grounds for proceeding with the case.'

'The trust wrote to Mrs Mackenzie to inform her

of the current Commission for Health Improvement investigation and we understand she is meeting with the CHI team.'

'The CHI investigation is ongoing and while we recognise that concerns were expressed publicly about the care provided in specific cases at the hospital in 1998, we hope that the investigation will help reassure people about the care provided today and allow us to demonstrate the progress we have made in service provision over the past two or three years.'

'The trust has the full confidence in the staff who work at Gosport War Memorial Hospital and in the excellent services they provide.'

'We are keen to support them during the review process to ensure they can contribute to it fully.'

The trust's operations director Ian Piper confirmed that it had carried out an internal inquiry in 1998 after Mrs Mackenzie complained about the standard of care given to her mother.

'We always take complaints very seriously and that complaint was investigated. No member of staff has been disciplined as a result of the investigation.'